



Tractor Unit Acoustemology

Sounds of a Dwelling on the Road

Agata Stanisz

- Abstract** In this article I provide an alternative ethnographic “description” of daily life of long-haul drivers. It is based on the assumption of acoustemology and field recording method. Data was gathered during research within truck drivers working for Western European freight companies and who inhabit cabs of their tractors units. Research corresponds with a current trend of anthropology of sound that consider audio-representations as a counterfactual way of production of anthropological knowledge. On the methodological level the main goal of my study was to transgress academic visibility. To accomplish this purpose I have decided to experience an ethnographic fieldwork through sound.
- Keywords** acoustemology, ambiance, anthropology of sound, audioethnography, dwelling, mobility, movement, road studies
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Researching cultures on the way

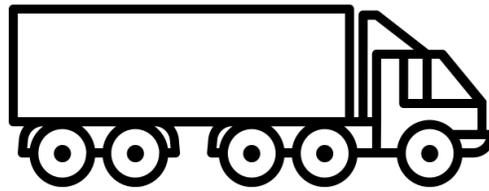
I have been studying sound from the anthropological perspective since 2006, when I introduced into my research and educational activities the method of field recording¹. I linked audio recording with practicing sensitivity indispensable for conducting ethnographic research in the area of anthropology at home (Peirano 1998, 105-128), especially in the context of urbanized and infrastructural day-to-day reality, where we encounter obvious and domesticated phenomena, which usually makes them semantically transparent for us (Atkinson 2007, 1905-1917; 2011, 12–26). Since I became interested in sound, I focus on the methodological aspect of applying the very basic assumption of anthropology of sound (or more broadly – anthropology of senses) that scientific democratization of senses and devisualization of field knowledge is not only possible but also epistemically prospective (Howes 1991, 3-23; 2005; Stoller 1997; Paterson 2009, 766-788). Generally, sound (its production, distribution and all types of auditory practices) significantly influences the way we experience reality. This influence is, in my opinion, especially pronounced in the urban, or widely speaking industrial, environment, which tend to be particularly sounded.

My first project where I consistently applied the ideas of anthropology of sound was created as late as in 2011. This is when I started doing ethnographic mobile studies among tractor unit drivers working for international forwarding companies and dealing with transport of goods in western Europe².

In the summer 2011, I got into the cab of a tractor unit for the first time. It was on the Danish-German border. The tractor unit with a semitrailer belonged to an international forwarding company employing about 200 drivers, mostly from Poland and Romania. This was when I set off on a three-week-long journey with my key informer – a professional driver with 30 years of experience.

1 See the author's Internet projects: *Sound Map*: alternative sound map of the city of Poznań created on the basis of field research conducted during classes in the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at AMU in Poznań, <http://www.soundsmmap.amu.edu.pl> [accessed 2017-04-11]; *Sound City*: ethnographic sound notes and city audiosphere studies, <http://miastodzwiekow.blogspot.com> [accessed 2017-04-11]; *Antropofon*: the first anthropological podcast with ethnographic features, <http://antropofon.blogspot.com> [accessed 2017-04-11]; as part of *Sounds of Europe*, <http://www.soundsofeurope.eu/eblog/field-recordings-trucks-and-an-anthropologist> [accessed 2017-04-11]; collections of field recordings on the Freesound, <http://www.freesound.org/people/miastodzwiekow> [accessed 2017-04-11] and Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/@sound_city_project [accessed 2017-04-11].

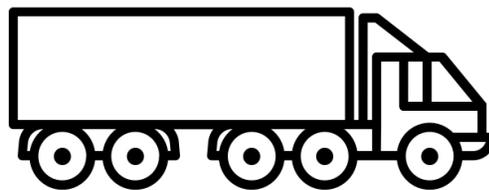
2 This article most of all reflects upon my first journey in a mobile field when I gathered the most impressive collection of field recordings and presented the research process as an audiovisual blog entitled *Transportodrone*, <http://transportodrone.tumblr.com/> [accessed 2017-04-11]. The project is located in between cultural anthropology, ethnography and the free culture movement, and should be associated with a postulate of sharing and democratizing both fieldwork and scientific knowledge. Also I have carried out the following projects to date: *Mobile modernizations. The influence of A2 motorway on the local cultural landscapes* (2013-2017) – a project financed by the National Science Centre, *Mobility industry: between the regime of logistics and performance* (2015), *Transnationality on the road. Studies of long-haul tractor unit drivers in Western Europe* (2012), *Culture on the road: Translocality and mobility of long-haul tractor unit drivers* (2011) – projects financed from the research grants as part of Young Staff Development program at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at AMU in Poznań.



Audio file 1: Hooking up a trailer. Padborg, Denmark, 2011-08-01.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/lmylculld8y2yo3n3vit?theme=dark>

Throughout the entire journey, I shared with him a three-square-meter cab of the tractor unit and for the first time experienced a situation in which it was impossible to suspend my ethnographic research for some time. I could not hide anything and I was completely dependent on the subject of my study. I started this journey with a certain idea of what experiences I would have on the road. I only had a roughly defined conceptual line, so making a decision to travel by a tractor unit was rather connected with searching for new ethnographic fascinations motivated more by aesthetics than by science. Finally, I wanted to find out whether it was possible to apply in practice the ideas of sound anthropology, acoustemology in particular. I was especially interested in the ways of dwelling in the conditions created by constant movement and flow, which meant domesticating both the cab spaces and the spaces where the drivers usually park, such as parking lots, industrial zones and forwarding company bases, or simply roadsides. In order to understand and adequately describe them, I decided to use a multisensory observation method with a particular emphasis on deep and participant listening (Olivieros 2005; Forsey 2010, 558-572). My basic research technique was field recording.

I assumed that I would be faced with the very heart of mobility and road culture, that I would be pacing constantly for thousands of kilometers and during breaks I would intensively integrate with drivers of various ethnic origins and nationalities. I was mistaken: I was on the road rather rarely, and the travelling spaces I had an opportunity to visit were mainly dominated by Poles. Mobility was replaced by immobility and stillness. During my first trip, I had an opportunity to take part in shuttle transportation, which is carried out between a few specifically defined locations. Additionally, this was also seasonal transport in Denmark and Germany, conditioned by the weather. Since my driver and I transported fruits, we circulated among farms, wholesale warehouses and processing plants located in specialized industrial zones. The mentioned weather conditions turned out to be rather significant as they were not



Audio file 2: The Elbe and rainy crossing.
Elbfähre Glückstadt Wischhafen, Germany, 2011-08-04.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/zu60c71cy2c67onnm41b?theme=dark>



very favorable at the time and partially or completely blocked the transit process. Rain and gales destroyed its continuity: fruits could not be picked so transporting them did not make sense.

In this situation, the daily life of a tractor unit driver (and mine) mainly consisted of pausing, waiting for further instructions, loading, unloading, documents, the end of a pause and the end of the rain. It was about waiting in specific places characterized by specific visual and acoustic, cultural and social features: parking lots, bushes, the middle of fields, industrial zones, ramps, queues, ferries or harbor customs borders. At the same time, the route I had taken was very clearly characterized by locality. A tractor unit cab is literally a home or a place where and through which drivers manifest and preserve their cultural identity. I was simultaneously mobile and immobile, whereas my research became translocal and unpredictable. Most of the time, I had a very confusing feeling that I was at the same time not moving from the place I was in and being in a place that was on the move. The moments when I was moving were rare and inevitably, specifically localized.

Although I had not set off with a specific theoretical project on my mind, except for a plan of checking whether it was actually possible to practically apply the anthropology of sound, it was still very important for me from the very beginning to systemize my research activities, which I decided to carry out on three levels: classical one – fieldnotes and field diary, visual one – photography, and audioethnographic one – field recordings. I had not planned to conduct any interviews and I was rather leaning towards multisensory experience and ethnographic immersion (Helmreich 2007, 621-641; 2010, 10; Thibaud 2011) consisting in hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling and observing. I also assumed my material would be “depersonalized”, excluding subjective perspective of the drivers. I thought that collecting their stories would result in merely a set of anecdotes, impressions and fragmented narrations. The specific nature of my field was not conducive to ethnography in its classical understanding.

The chosen documentation method emerging from fieldwork knowledge is consistent with the empirical data published in *Transportodrone* blog, which is a chronological, multilayered record of my first 21-day journey. Each day is presented in a form of field notes, photographs, a description of collected sounds and audio files, together with maps of places, where the recordings were made. This multi-layer nature of the data simultaneously reflects three ways in which I experienced the field. For three weeks, I lived on about three square meters with my driver. We were constantly in each other's company because of the places where we paused and weather conditions (pouring rain, tornadoes, low temperatures). This is why I got immersed in the field very quickly. Tractor unit driver's routine, including its acoustic dimension, became my routine and my daily life.

I was exclusively in male company of drivers, workers from factories, processing plants and wholesale warehouses where we loaded and unloaded the carried goods. I observed men. I went for walks or shopping with them. I cooked, ate and drank whiskey with them. I exchanged CDs and talked about some silly things with them. Sometimes I photographed them. I observed how they were working, pausing, what they were wearing, how they were managing their time, communicating with their families, I checked what type of (if any) community they were forming. I also experienced all sorts of treatment: as a sexual object, quasi-daughter, colleague, a person who should be pitied because of her unidentified occupation of an anthropologist and also, by mistake, as another professional driver.



Masculinity and male work ethos were the two elements that I had expected to be the most pronounced. However, they had a different quality. My expectations and ideas were imbued with stereotypes concerning tractor unit drivers. What actually turned out to be most significant in this context was the link between masculinity (especially male body) and machines (especially tractor units) in ambivalent conditions: simultaneous mobility and immobility, mutilisedness and locality, internationality and nationalism. These seemingly mutually exclusive oppositions existed side by side in the context of, firstly, a specific type of dwelling, secondly, a specific sound space full of industrial and roadside noises, buzzes and bourdons co-creating the ambience of tractor unit drivers' everyday reality.

Acoustemology of tractor unit and dwelling on the road

Acoustemology is a theory that verges between anthropology and ethnomusicology and deals with acoustic reality. It concerns the cognitive potential of sound and its audibility, which allows for understanding their sense and meanings. This approach emphasizes auditory practices, both the present and the historic ones, as well as collective and individual ones. It offers an alternative for the visual paradigm, which has dominated the western concept of knowledge and human perception since Renaissance. Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (2015) was the one who initiated acoustemological approach as an alternative to the anthropology of music, already well-established in the 1960s (Merriam 1964). This scholar demonstrated an impressive potential of sound and listening with reference to the system of cultural meanings and social situations where they can be found. His approach should be interpreted as rejection of the traditional, acoustic and musicological sound interpretation, which defined it as a physical phenomenon that can undergo scientific objectification.

Acoustemology is actually a sounded variant of epistemology, where cognitive processes are shaped on the basis of experience, valuation and use. It allows for asking a question about what is already discovered and discoverable through sound and hearing, and how sound influences the social; how and in which contexts the social and the cultural are decisive about some groups of people, phenomena, or identity manifestations etc. being audible or not. The concept of acoustemology does not imply epistemology in the formal sense. As its creator Steven Feld claims, it is not about metaphysical and transcendental proposition pertaining to the notion of truth. It is more about relationality of knowledge production processes, which John Dewey calls contextual and experimental cognition (Dewey, Bantley 1949). Steven Feld introduced acoustemology in 1992 in order to locate in the social studies his research on the cultural dimension of sound (Feld 2015, 12-21). This dimension is nothing else than sounded relations between people, non-human reality (things, animals, plants), the environment and technology. Thus, the anthropology of sound studies relations in activities, whose creation is closely linked to the acoustic aspects of everyday life understood as an intrinsic element of the habitus. The scientific discovery through relations makes us aware of the fact that we never acquire knowledge in a simple way, because this process always includes interaction, communication and it is conditioned by the processes of participation and reflection (Feld 2015, 12-21).

Acoustemology is also a notion connected to anthropology of sound, which was developed also by Steven Feld as a critical answer to the limitations of anthropology of music, especially the paradigm of "music in culture" by Alan Merriam (1964) and "human only organized



sounds” by John Blacking (1973). Anthropology of sound supports the idea of taking into consideration variety of sounds and widening the notion of music by including e.g. language, poetry, voice, natural sounds and sounds produced by other species than human beings, machines, and environment acoustics. It is also crucial not to ignore the technological mediation of sound and the ways sound circulates in a given socio-cultural context. Therefore, sound reproduction and distribution should always be taken into consideration.

At the same time, it should be noted that acoustemology rejects the most important legacy of acoustic ecology, i.e. soundscape (Schafer 1977). This is caused by the fact that the landscape analogy is inadequate as it evokes physical distance to the already mentioned relationality, agency and perception. Acoustemology is not supposed to serve yet another essentialization and its application does not result in substituting a visualistic ocularcentrism with sonocentrism (see also Helmreich 2010, 10; Ingold 2007, 10-13). From the anthropological point of view, when we take into consideration the acoustic dimension of social life, listening should be located in its center and engaged in a specific time-space context.

Thus, tractor unit acoustemology, which is the subject of this article, would be founded on a rather unoriginal idea that everyday life of tractor unit drivers is shared with various Others and based on real, virtual and imagined relations and co-activities. This relationality is the basic condition of dwelling on the road, a product of conscious or unconscious ways of multisensual participation in the world, conditioned by, e.g. listening to its auditory: verbal and non-verbal, human and non-human, musical and non-musical, aspects.

Sound should be studied in such situations where the subject who is listening is mentally and physically involved. Avoiding the acoustic in anthropological practices, especially among communities living in acoustically rich environments, is an unfair privilege awarded to visuality. What is sonic in a given culture is also socially situated and manifested to the people experiencing it, if we assume that sound is something that influences and resonates in them. The ability to assimilate, express and reflect sounds is one of the basic tools that allows people to orientate themselves in the reality surrounding them. It becomes an element of various cosmologies and a medium for communication and expression. However, applying sound anthropology in studies conducted among tractor unit drivers, so in a context filled with intensive buzz and noisy acoustics, turned out to be difficult and not so obvious, especially due to methodological reasons.

Sound anthropology is a rather narrow specialization characterized by interdisciplinarity, often entering scientific discourses which are not always very useful in the context of the reflections on the urban and western European audiosphere. It is not a simple task to keep these reflections in the anthropological paradigm, considering this interdisciplinarity, which is a blend of philosophical, musical reflection and acoustic ecology. Moreover, most of the publications on this subject which can be called anthropological refer to studies located outside Europe and describing small communities (Feld 1990; Roseman 1991; Yamada 1997) where the auditory reality with all its literal and cultural distinctness makes it very difficult for the anthropological reflection on a complex, urbanized and postindustrial community to defend itself. It is not a simple task to look outside the fenomenologizing, aesthetizing, ecologizing sonic experience of roadside, parking or factory spaces.

In the case of my studies, doing ethnographic research through sound means listening, recording, editing registered sounds and, with their help, developing acoustic representations



of not so much the drivers' community, but rather their activities, events which they co-created and took part in. Since my goal was to make an attempt to describe with sound the daily life of this occupational group, every sound that I heard and decided to register could turn out to be important. This audioethnography of a kind was actually my conscious, and thus selective, active and in-depth listening, sensitive to the presence and significance of sound. Therefore, I did not restrict myself to registering composed sounds (music), speech and narration, but I rather focused on general acoustic environment, even if it contained tractor unit engines roaring monotonously, the motorway humming, boiling water bubbling or the belts fastened on the loads creaking. Ethnography should study the sounds that people hear every day because this is one of the ways they discover, experience and exist in the world. According to Steven Feld, a place is created the moment sounds are produced and present (Feld 2004, 465). Regardless whether sound is particularly appreciated in a given culture or not, including it in the notion of habitus widens the perspective applied by anthropology to look closer at certain phenomena and cultural activities.

A tractor unit is a three-square-meter space, which becomes a place carrying a certain value and significance owing to certain appropriating activities, both symbolic and material. A tractor unit cab is often interpreted as an extension of the driver's body (Laurier 2007; Laurier et al. 2008, 1-23; Merriman 2007, 1-23; Sheller 2003) it is not only a tool intended for mobility (Cresswell, Merriman 2011, 7-9; Normark 2006, 8-10) or a workplace, but also a recurrent dwelling. Drivers themselves call their cars homes on wheels. Moreover, these moving houses constitute specific points where strategies characteristic for transnational relations are put in practice. Drivers are constantly in touch with their families and friends, calling or contacting them on the Internet, and their cabs which they appropriate, are filled with material manifestations of the homes which they have left their roots in. The mentioned cyclical nature of this appropriation stems from the fact that, in the case of the company whose tractor units I was travelling in, setting off on a new journey (which takes three to four weeks with a one-week break) equals entering a different three-meter space from the previous one as each time the drivers are assigned a new tractor unit. The company which my drivers work for owns 130 tractor units and about 200 semitrailers. The semitrailers are sometimes pulled by tractor units that do not belong to the company, but are leased by the drivers. This means that every few weeks the drivers have to recreate their workspace and dwelling. In practice, this reproduction always follows a certain pattern where an identical set of accessories is used. Drivers domesticate these spaces with a local set of objects, such as spotted, striped or flowery sheets, small rugs, cushions of different shapes, stuffed toys (sometimes with regional symbols or shapes), family photographs, plastic bowls where they wash themselves, fragrant gadgets, laptops with wallpapers always presenting their homes or the local landscape. They do not enter the cab in shoes, but in slippers, they drink from mugs presenting their children, eat from plates that are a part of the tableware left at home. The interiors of their cars are cleaned every single day: they beat dust out of the rugs, clean it from the furniture and sweep out the cabs.

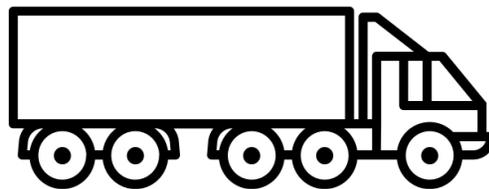
It happens very rarely in Europe that a driver is at the same time the owner of a tractor unit, which excludes the possibility of personalizing the unit on the outside. In contrast to the well-known in the pop culture American trucks, the European ones do not have any individual character: they are neither painted in an original way nor ornamented with additional lighting,



decorative grille, chrome elements, pennants or iconographic symbols. They also do not display the names of the drivers. They are simply cars of a certain make having a certain reputation concerning the amount of space provided, ergonomics, sustainability and of course frequency of failure. It is also difficult to find analogies between the culture of American and European tractor unit drivers. In Europe, this occupation is not so well-reputed and socially respected as in the USA, and it bears no connection with the mythologized idea of freedom and nomadic journey (see DePillo, Poduch 2005; Hamilton 2008; Ouellet 1994).

European tractor units are not only places for everyday interactions with the closest ones, but also spaces allowing to express family bonds as well as ethnic and national identity. This is where multisensual representations of locality are developed with the use of all the senses: sight, hearing, smell and taste. These mobile places travel through mobility channels (motorways, bridges, ferries and trains), park in non-places (Augé 1995, 75-115), characterized by standardization and anonymity, and their access to zones has very defined limits. Simultaneously, they are also private and intimate places, sealed and shielded from the outside world in spite of the simultaneous, constant, panoptical even access to the outside (Laurier 2007; Laurier, Lorimier et al. 2008, 1-23). Temporary locations in the mentioned non-places blur the definiteness of this category by often taking a repetitive and sometimes routinized form. All types of parking lots, roadsides, transport centers, gas stations, forwarding company bases, industrial zones where the localnesses situated on three square meters, go outside and create a mutual, often nationalized relation.

So what does dwelling on the road sound like? What can be scientifically achieved through registration and then analysis and interpretation of field recordings? As mentioned before, drivers are constantly in Augéan non-places: driving along them and pausing, waiting, being still, spending hours in front of computer screens, smartphone and GPS interfaces, which contradicts the common image of mobility.

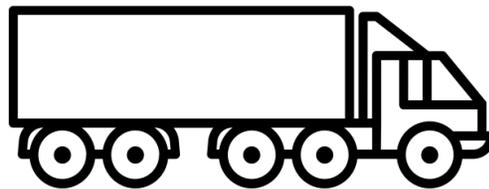


Audio file 3: Parking for trucks at night. Near of Kolding, Denmark, 2011-08-02.

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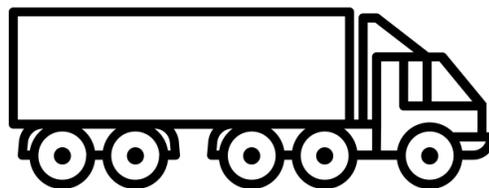
Being in those spaces, or even temporarily living in them, results in the feeling of being suspended in time and space and being at the same time everywhere and nowhere, in an ambivalent environment (full of noisy sounds, strong smells, variety of tensions and stimuli or sensually depraving, boring to the breaking point). I locate the experience of tractor unit cab between stimulus and deprivation. The fieldwork among the drivers was ambivalent because, on the one hand, it was very intensive and vibrant (sensually intensive, full of stimuli and stressors), and on the other hand, it was extremely homogenous (noises, stinks, the same tastes all the time, the same routine, the never-ending waiting). The main sources of stimuli were bodies, internal and

external spaces, cargos, machines, objects, nature, actions, interactions and so on. In most cases they were manifested, generated and perceptible with the sense of hearing. Dwelling ambience on the road is only seemingly marked by monotony and homogeneity. Although it is mainly characterized by what people usually call noise, this noise is nuanced.



Audio file 4: Whirr of battery recharging. Somewhere in Denmark, 2011-08-06.

<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/7cz2bjbv7gjiuq7kzpeb?theme=dark>



Audio file 5: Heating the truck. Oure, Denmark, 2011-08-10.

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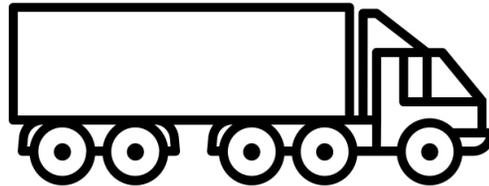
In order to make the specific nature of the auditory dimension of the drivers' daily life clearer it is worth mentioning once more that a tractor unit cab is always a space of co-presence. Consequently, it is characterized by: constant mess (too many objects, doubled in number, objects out of place, overproduction of rubbish); no physical distance, no personal space, being literally at an arm's length – nothing can be hidden, neither work nor physical or psychological indispositions; embarrassing situations connected with physiological needs, but also all types of bodily rituals, for example, grooming (brushing teeth, cutting nails, brushing hair, squeezing pimples, shaving, cleaning ears etc.) which are neutralized; doing everything together (walking, working, cooking, watching movies, socializing with other drivers, going to toilet).

Bodily sounds are mostly those sounds which are audible inside the cab, connected with physiology and metabolism and also with the specific feeling of sensory deprivation caused by routine, boredom and constant waiting. These sounds become most pronounced when there is a standstill, or when drivers work in pairs and the sounds gain importance due to the presence of a second person. These are moaning, puffing, farting, hiccups, stomach gurgling, eructation, burping, loud swallowing of saliva, saliva squirting, scratching, snoring, throat clearing, clicking, slight coughing, hissing, sighing and nose blowing.

Then, especially if minutes and hours go by while waiting for instructions, loading or unloading, there is tapping fingers on the cockpit, finger snapping, button pushing, feet shuffling, teeth grinding, clicking phalanges, whistling and murmuring.



Then there are the sounds connected with eating, such as slurping, swallowing, crunching, chewing, eating noisily, blowing on hot food, smelling and all the non-verbalized sounds coming out of the body after consuming too much alcohol (e.g. vomiting).



Audio file 6: Waiting, pausing, crunching. Neuenkirchen, Germany, 2011-08-11.
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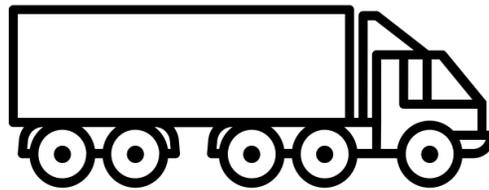
This sound dimension remains significant in the context of my research methodology. It is, thus, important to me as a researcher and it should be analyzed with reference to autoethnographic approach (Okely 1992, 1-28). My permanent presence activated the importance of the above sounds. The studies I was conducting equaled cohabitation, cooperation and co-presence. Therefore, the field was instantly materialized, while the concept of participant observation gained a different meaning and I started treating this method with some suspicion. Three square meters of the cab were of course a part of the field, but this part which I was present in all the time. The participation and the said observation were so intensive that the traditional meaning of this study technique was insufficient. The notion describing this specific 24/7 situation was, in my opinion, total intimacy: bodily, emotional, intellectual, ritualized and daily, especially at the level of activities and reactions connected with the context of work.

In anthropology, the idea of intimacy is associated with the concept of Michael Herzfeld (as cultural intimacy), which I have borrowed from him due to a few reasons (Herzfeld 2004). Firstly, cultural intimacy seems to be a crucial element of the relations between the drivers who I had an opportunity to meet and observe. Those relations are surely characterized by community cordiality (expressed by not hiding bodily sounds, but for example, rather burping together, or lack of any reservations when farting in the company of others), which I could also identify with to some extent, especially with reference to my nationality. Secondly, this very intimacy and familiarity which took a total, even radical form, describes this research field and its intimate acoustics the best. The acoustic experiencing of three square meters was verging on embarrassment caused by the lack of privacy and the inevitable closeness, including the emotional closeness whether it was desired or not. Emotions are often manifested with the body: the way of speaking, reactions, gestures and other uncontrollable bodily behaviors connected to metabolism or physiology. Personal, individual privacy was impossible to achieve. Privacy existed only in the arrangement of me and him, my driver, which we could perhaps protect from undesired interference from the outside of our tractor unit's cab, but this type of privacy was usually impossible to achieve as well (Stanisz 2016, 47-68).

This rather small, in terms of measurements, mobile field located on the road or always waiting next to the road, enabled me to gather almost the same experiences as those of the driv-

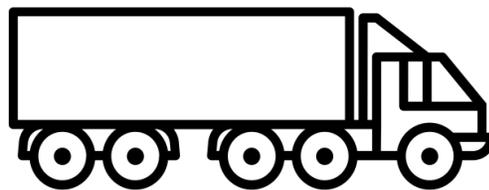
ers: their daily professional life taking place, as most people think, solely in the conditions of mobility and multisitedness. These experiences were perceptively intense because of the acuteness of multisensory stimuli, which were impossible to avoid. This unavoidable existence in the center of reality which I wanted to become my new research field made it possible for me to observe, or rather feel, and hear, everything very closely, in a most awkward and embarrassing, sometimes even unbearable, way.

Drivers never cease to be on the road, even if they are on their one- or two-week breaks at home. They constantly talk about what happened to them, where they were, what they saw and who they met.

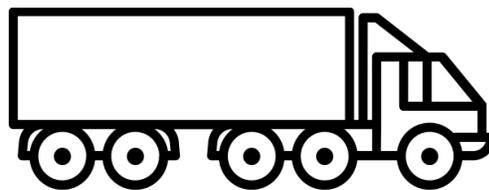


Audio file 7: Trucker tales or pause and boredom. Oure, Denmark, 2011-08-05.
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The dividing line between the place where they have their roots and their mobile homes is blurred. One or two weeks of a break is a time for preparing to the next cycle connected with recreating and preserving their mobile dwelling so that the driver could feel there at home. Hence, it must look, smell, sound properly and enable the driver to undertake daily, ideologically localized activities, such as watching favorite TV shows, listening to Polish music, the radio or even watching Polish TV.



Audio file 8: Watching movie. Oure, Denmark, 2011-08-11.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/rjjc002uol1vkv4r9t7o?theme=dark>



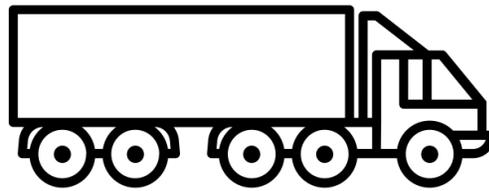
Audio file 9: Ambiance with Polish music. Oure, Denmark, 2011-08-06.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/8f9u7fpl44cochn0od8q?theme=dark>



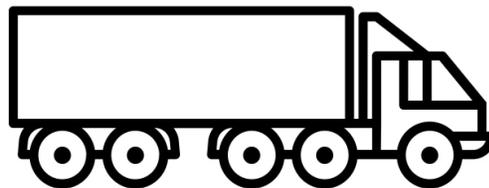
The drivers also read Polish newspapers whenever they have access to the Internet, they communicate with their Polish friends on social networking sites. This is the reason why the category that describes such a way of life is multilocality, which scholars such as Vincent Kaufmann (2005, 119-135) or Johanna Rolshoven (2008, 17-25) interpret as a strategy necessary to contextualize the activities undertaken by mobile actors. The practice of locating themselves in mobile places makes those drivers become creators of localness in numerous localizations in the conditions of flow and mobility.

National identification of tractor unit drivers in the spaces of mobility takes place, as mentioned before, in a multisensory way. Mutual recognition does not only depend on visibility because European drivers wear similar clothes, and the cars and semitrailers assigned to them are registered in different European countries. In the international and multilingual working conditions experienced by the drivers, even language loses its quality to identify somebody in a definite way. You can recognize your people by the smell of the food they are heating, the type of beer they are drinking or the music they are listening to. Cultural intimacy comes to light not only during pauses and while waiting, but also when the drivers are fulfilling their responsibilities. They are not just passive machine operators whose task is to transport about 40 tons of all types of goods. They are also responsible for taking care of the load: placing it safely in the semitrailer, securing it against movement and then making sure it is safely unloaded. They also need to pay attention to whether the distribution of the goods is properly documented, they often have to negotiate with forwarding offices or on customs borders. Nationality is the key element in those negotiations. Polish drivers use a specific language, a type of jargon created on the basis of the vocabulary connected with forwarding, logistics and physical work. This jargon is a blend of the official languages spoken in the countries where the drivers travel with their goods. In the case of the company whose cars I was travelling in, these countries were Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Norway. The vocabulary acquired by the Polish drivers oftentimes turns out to be insufficient when bureaucracy comes into play. This is when office employees who are Poles, have Polish, or at least Russian or Ukrainian, origin (linguistic similarities), become the key personae, and such people can be encountered in the most surprising places. This type of intimacy significantly facilitates not only the work of the Polish drivers, but also the speed of the flow of goods in Europe if we take into consideration that most drivers working in Europe are Poles. Owing to this intimacy, some strict rules governing many forwarding companies, factories, wholesale warehouses or processing plants, are broken, for example, working hours, times when goods can be received into the warehouse, lunch break hours.

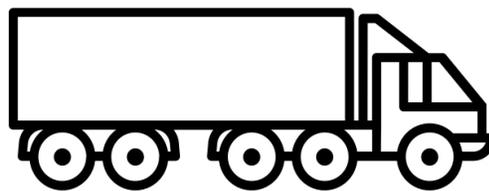
In the context of the drivers' everyday work, the machine sounds are the most intensive, inevitable and permanent. There are fluctuating whirring of the engine depending on the engine revs, suppressed sounds from the inside of the cab and the semitrailer, sounds of un/loading), blinking of the turn-signal, sounds of forklifts, passing cars, trains, humming and hissing of factories, steel plants, the noise of ferries, turbines, airplanes, the buzzing of the truck fridge, factory coolers, clumping, rumbling, clomping, whistling, whooshing, whizzing, zipping, knocking, pattering, cracking, crunching, horning, tooting, beeping, recharging batteries, sound of the air-conditioning, cranes or pile drivers.



Audio file 10: Waiting for cargo. A turn-signal sound. Hilden, Germany, 2011-08-16.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/4pgpxiak00om1p7j9j6a?theme=dark>



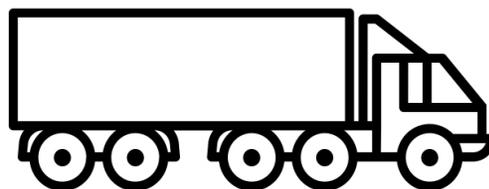
Audio file 11: Pile driver in a river port. Randers, Germany, 2011-08-17.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/xsih0mkfokeuc03v3buo?theme=dark>



Audio file 12: Noise of fruit processing plant, Neuenkirchen, Germany, 2011-08-02.
<http://transportodrone.tumblr.com/post/11574815847>

Moreover, there are the sounds of accelerating and slowing down depending on the type of load, the sound of parking, opening and closing the ramps and gantries. Many of them are generated with the work of muscles: moving the tarpaulin, securing the load, with belts creaking when pulled with carabiners.

These are also the sounds produced by the carried loads: gurgling, creaking, squeaking, metallic tapping, knocking, rumbling. Additionally, there are the sounds connected with fueling up, passing through the gates on motorways, humming of the traffic (also during traffic jams), the noises generated by roadworks and repairs on the way, e.g. wheels being changed or tarpaulins being patched.



Audio file 13: Tires swap. Pagborg, Denmark, 2011-08-10.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/gdy51zj9qz4prmixb96n?theme=dark>

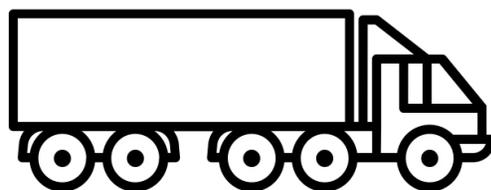
Finally, some acoustic changes in tunnels, on bridges, under flyovers, on ferries, platforms, pastures, large parking lots, inside foundries or steelmaking plants.

To make it simpler, what constitutes this ambience are noises and buzzes, popularly and ecologically deemed as undesired, polluting the acoustic environment, the symptom of a lo-fi soundscape (Schefer 1977). But this is exactly the factor decisive about the immersion in the field.

Each space has an acoustic dimension which co-creates its specific nature. However, the atmosphere of a given space or place is not created by sound itself. In order to feel the atmosphere and then understand it, one needs a multisensual experience and know the social, cultural and historical meanings inherent to it. The feeling, immersion and experiencing are not sufficient for a researcher. One cannot exist without the other: cultural mechanisms cannot be adequately described and explained without being experienced with many senses. On the other hand, such multisensual experience cannot be interpreted without the knowledge of its context. Applying the method of immersive ethnography in the case of my studies, whose direction was mainly established with this noise characteristic for this context, would not be complete without taking into consideration light, colors, smells, bodily experiences, movement, vibration, ways of moving, talking and communicating. All of this constituted the data which, firstly, co-create fieldwork knowledge, and secondly and consequently, co-create scientific/anthropological knowledge. Ambiences always produce a blend of synesthesia proprioception, a complex mixture of perception, impressions and emotions. They are always closely linked to the connection between sensations and socially and culturally conditioned expression.

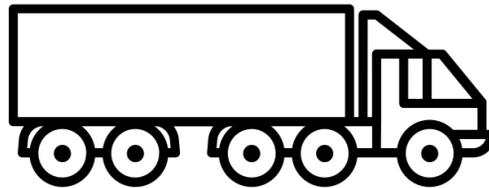
Ambiance can be defined as a time-space form of a sensory point of view. It is related to feeling a place. Every ambiance produces a specific way of manifesting and expressing meanings and values in a material/physical presence of certain things, embodied in types of behavior, coexistence in a defined space and undertaking there certain activities. Thus, ambiance is at the same time subjective and objective: it includes the experiences of people, but also creates a context for their lives, daily activities, temporary or permanent situations (Thibaud 2011).

The acoustics of drivers' mobile workplaces is co-created by physical non-human elements such as electronic devices of any kind. Their sonorousness is comprised of sound alarms of cell-phones, voices and beeping of GPSs, sounds of tachographs, seat belt alarms, screeches, hums from laptops, tablets, communication systems and pagers, beeping of all types of identifiers, debit or loyalty cards, various indicator lights or cruise controls.

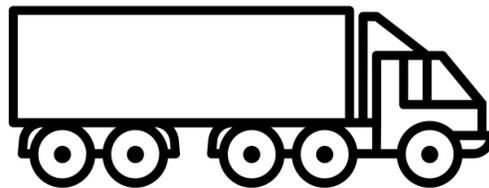


Audio file 14: GPS crash. Hamburg, Germany, 2011-08-19.

<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/376js7smcakyopkznpni?theme=dark>

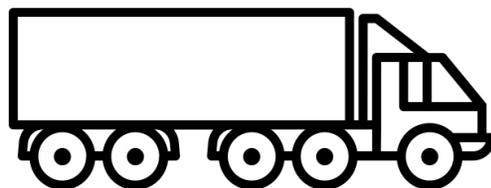


Audio file 15: Buzz of voltage Inverter. Spjald, Denmark, 2011-08-18.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/xr1vsxe5na2e2arb77m8?theme=dark>



Audio file 16: Playing stupid computer games. Oure, Denmark, 2011-08-13.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/x064rzortgky3ec2rpxr?theme=dark>

The most interesting ones include Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation devices. Such systems usually have female verbal representations: drivers believe that a woman's voice is more pleasant to listen to that of a man, and that it gives them a sense of security. Drivers enter into verbal interaction with their GPS systems: they talk to them, ask them questions, lace into them and curse them. The information provided by GPS is also verified on the basis of the knowledge and experience of drivers, who learn the routes as time goes by. The purpose of the navigation system is to provide its users with data on their geographical location and facilitate navigating through an unknown territory. It allows drivers to determine geographic coordinates, record their track "to the point" and "on the route", return to the starting point "on the same route", measure the distance, determine the surface and even calculate sunrise and sunset times and the phases of the moon. As a result, mobile workplaces are always precisely localized. Drivers constantly monitor their locations and the movement of their tractor units. The information provided by GPS tends to be out-of-date. Therefore, other ways of finding, for example, loading or unloading locations are devised. In the situations where drivers cannot find the right way or a certain address, their family members come to their aid. Drivers call their wives or adult children, so they look up the desired locations on the Internet and afterwards navigate the tractor units using mobile phones. The loading and unloading locations (industrial zones, villages, often fields, metropolis centers and suburbs) are always situated in spaces inhabited by people who could potentially help the drivers find the right way. Local populations may sometimes provide drivers with incorrect or misleading information, as a result of which the transit acquires a free-floating nature and the drivers get lost. However, situations when people organize guides for the drivers who have got lost are equally frequent, especially in small towns and villages. In practice, either a person familiar with the area occupies the passenger seat in the cab or there is a car driving in front of the tractor unit that navigates it right to the point the driver would otherwise not be able to find.



Audio file 17: Road-mender as guide. Humburg, Germany, 2011-08-19.

<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/96hoi4g49j0claj49ui0?theme=dark>

Cybermobility supported by the software of GPS navigation and communication systems overlaps with human situational agency. Physical movement, the ability to use mobile Internet, mobile phones and satellite navigation systems, create a new form of communication on the road, new forms of coordination of both human and mechanical motion and, in the case of long-haul tractor unit drivers, lead to the blurring of lines between homes and workplaces, and between private and public matters. According to Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry, what we face here is convergence between transport and communication as well as the process of co-presence mobilization (Hannam, Sheller, Urry 2006, 4-6).

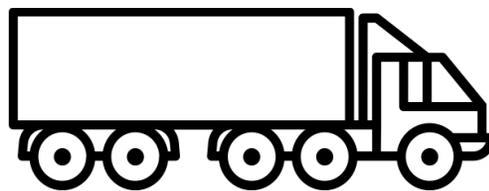
Taking into consideration the aural dimension of communication via mobile phones or the Internet, which constitute significant components of tractor unit drivers' work, effectively debunks and nullifies the favoring of ocularcentrism rooted not only in experiencing, but also in the scientific understanding of the modern media. This creates an opportunity to rethink the phenomenology of screen media and interfaces. Sounds produced by mobile devices co-create the daily ambience of working and dwelling on the road. Michael Bull (2004, 173-190) defines this phenomenon as the auditory privatization of public space. This is accompanied by audible telepresence – the embodiment of co-presence, proximity and intimacy – through sounds, not through vision (Richardson 2009). For this reason, my research constitute an expression of resistance to the visual paradigm. Vision is simply insufficient. This paradigm most often refers to the hegemony of the eye and marginalization of other senses. This is reflected in the concept of knowledge described in terms of either illumination or enlightenment as a process of acquiring knowledge using one's eyesight. The juxtaposition of vision – light and knowledge is deeply rooted and we still tend to forget that reality is multi-sensual.

Radio, singing, satellite television, whistling tunes – music inside and outside the cabs – at petrol stations, parking lots, bars and restaurants, car washes, in toilets and public showers, shops and at some parties the drivers pass by.

They are an example of manifesting one's national and ethnic identity through music. These are the means used for creating and organizing space, setting the time, defining identity, for example, through rituals which are to assure the community that it occupies a certain place in the world and that there is a political project for the future (Smith 1997, 502-529). Therefore, tractor unit drivers use music and other musical sounds to emphasize their background and identity. And so they listen to disco polo (Polish disco music) or, less frequently, Polish rock and pop music while driving or, more often, while resting at a parking lot. Most tractor unit drivers take satellite dishes, which enable them to listen to Polish radio stations, football matches commented on by Polish footballers, or to Sunday's masses. For Polish drivers, this constitutes an important demonstration of their national origin. They constantly travel on standardized roads,

park at almost identical parking lots next to other tractor units whose drivers cannot be easily identified at first sight. This is the reason why listening to loud music is crucial: it allows drivers of a given nationality to identify one another. Listening to local radio stations also constitutes a response to the identity of the infrastructure for mobility and the policy of freedom of movement within the Schengen Area: the changes of the language in which the news is broadcast or songs that are sung tend to be the only sign that a driver has arrived in another country. The radio creates the atmosphere of being in Germany, the Czech Republic, France, Denmark or the Netherlands (see Bull 2003, 185-202; 2004, 243-259; Stockfelt 1994, 19-38).

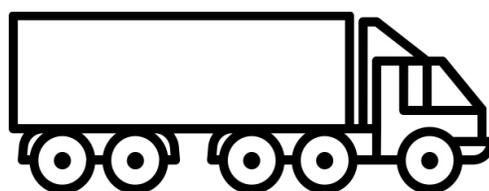
Listening to music in cabs is also related to creating an acoustic cocoon in order to achieve serenity (Bijsterveld 2010, 189-211). Music drowns out the noise of the tractor unit and it blocks other sounds out. At parking lots, this is additionally accompanied by visual isolation after closing the curtains tightly, which intensifies the sense of intimacy and privacy. More often than not, it is related to the rationing the access to the cab and a sense of control over the acoustic environment.



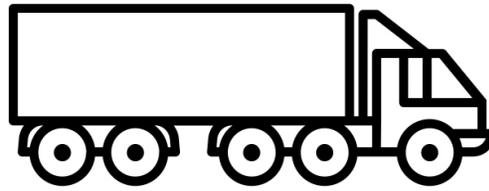
Audio file 18: Listening Polish electro-pop. Padborg, Denmark, 2011-08-14.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/1sknr3g2g1960901qpya?theme=dark>

According to Irwin Altman, a psychologist, it is not about the isolation level of, for example, sound and vision, but about the level of control as to who shall have access to the cab (Altman 1976, 7-29). Michael Bull (2003, 185-202) points out that listening to the radio or music in a car provides drivers with a sense of being in charge, managing the journey. In the case of tractor unit drivers, this is a false sense of power as it is not them who decide on the directions and the course of their routes. They are fully dependent on forwarding agents, their working time and driving time regime, employees at various levels of hierarchy at loading and unloading locations, and on various incidents (road accidents, traffic jams, weather conditions, breakdowns of tractor units).

The food consumed by the drivers: its smell, preparation and consumption, constitutes the most expressive demonstration of their national origin. Food preparation also entails characteristic sounds: boiling water heated for coffee, potatoes being fried, meat sauces gurgling, vegetables being cut, the hissing sound from gas bottles, the faint hum of a fridge.



Audio file 19: Frying Polish potatoes. Oure, Denmark, 2011-08-13.
<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/gpuev6ujg55xkvqss0bc?theme=dark>



Audio file 20: Cooking Polish frikadellers. Langenfeld, Germany, 2011-08-16.

<https://app.box.com/embed/preview/4qkio3dlrel3z69rjk4f?theme=dark>

Not only Polish drivers of long-haul tractor units, but also the Hungarian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian or Russian ones consume home-made food prepared earlier in the form of bottled jars containing the most stereotypical national dishes (see Hammer 2002, 80-126; Seabra Real Sampaio da Nóvoa 2014). Those jars carried by the Polish drivers contain bigos, stuffed cabbage, pork chops and frikadellers, stew, soups, croquettes, pancakes, salads, fried fish. Apart from jars, the drivers are always equipped with home-made cakes and biscuits, white wheat bread or rolls, Polish beer and vodka. During their 48-hour weekend pauses, drivers sometimes prepare common meals which constitute a mixture of simple ethnic dishes. Carrying one's own food and not eating at the restaurants or bars at parking lots is, of course, motivated by financial reasons. The attachment to national tastes and smells – not only the ones of dinners, but also of bread, vegetables or alcohol – can be, however, interpreted as a form of resistance to the mobile, unpredictable pace of life in mobile homes.

Anthropology of sound and ambiances of mobility

What can be offered by the acoustemological approach and audioethnography in the context of the presence and use of sound in the culture of tractor unit drivers? Knowledge about the world is mainly associated with vision but this does not change the fact that the reality on and by the road is experienced through various sounds produced by human activity (those accompanying interactions, life of various professional groups related to freight transport and production, those accompanying nomadism and tourism or roadside entertainment), mechanical sounds (all sorts of drones: from the sounds of traffic through those of construction machinery to household appliances), reproduced composed sounds (music ubiquitous at petrol stations, in shops, restaurants, shared or privatized with from MP3 players, iPods, mobile phones or laptops) as well as natural sounds (wind, water, animals). In spite of the fact that everyday life of tractor unit drivers comprises a whole spectrum of multi-sensual experiences and particular senses should actually not be separated from one another in an artificial manner, it seems, though, that it is worth making an effort to consider how the examination of a given socio-cultural context can contribute to scientific knowledge by being listened to. According to Jean-Paul Thibaud, the fact that sound can be studied in an effective way, as it can be recorded, measured and described, constitutes one of the arguments in favor of taking cognizance of it. In the face of that, it has become possible to elaborate on the sound paradigm in social science, design, architecture, ecology or geography (Thibaud 2011).

Furthermore, sound or, in particular, ambiance facilitate scientific immersion. This is due to the fact that sound has specific physical properties – it is omnidirectional and literally per-



meates our bodies. We are surrounded by sounds which propagate all around us and come from far and wide all at the same time. In other words, sounds set us in the very centre of the world (Ong 1981). Additionally, sound resonates, which is particularly relevant in the context of my studies. Resonating is the key phenomenon for the acoustic environment experienced by tractor unit drivers. It is also recognized as the basis for broadly defined sensorial experience. Sensation is not possible without vibrations and resonance, regardless of whether we talk about sound, light or texture (Deleuze 2003). Elisabeth Grosz makes the following comment on the topic: sensation is nothing else than vibrations which resonate inside our bodies – in our internal organs and the nervous system (Grosz 2008, 62). In this very sense, moving around in tractor units is organic, physical and strongly linked to sound as movement in these vehicles is sonic and vibrant at the same time; every activity has a sonic dimension and the produced sounds are droning, intense and noisy in nature.

Sound also reveals the context and facilitates documenting and describing the dynamics of ambiance owing to its aforementioned physical properties. Therefore, field recording constitutes an effective method of ethnography of senses. It is crucial to understand that one cannot experience sound without time which it is constitutive for. Sound embodies the meaning of time: when we record or listen, we inevitably feel its passing, its rhythm. According to Henri Lefebvre (1984), it is impossible to understand the atmosphere of a given place without its rhythm. Research practice reflected in anthropology of sound actually mirrors the lifestyle of drivers whose activities, work and everyday lives are concealed in the periodic mobility.

While listening to ambiance, we primarily hear how it is generated as it is in a constant process of formation and transformation owing to various social practices. Therefore, it is not just a space and it does not exist without human activity. In the face of that, ambiance is always collective and reflects certain parts of social life. Thus, the acoustic dimension of a single tractor unit cab constitutes one of many possible atmospheres of this space. It is an example of how the context of drivers' everyday life can sound, and how the multilocalness in mobility can sound.

Exploring the world through sound is different from exploring it with one's eyes. The prevalence of the latter in the western culture often means that experiencing through other senses is filtered by vision. It is no coincidence, though, that I have supplied the collection of ambiances in the Transportodrone project with descriptions, extracts from field notes, satellite maps and pictures of particular places which had a certain sonic value at a given moment. Understanding sounds which are taken out of the spatial and situational context is impossible, especially with reference to the industrial audiosphere whose overall acoustics is largely homogeneous and not easily assimilated by its recipients, mainly due to its pejoratively evaluated noisiness. There is no possibility for recognizing the nature of acoustemological processes without visual clues. The sound itself does not work. Of course, limiting knowledge to visuality sets limits to our ability to understand the meanings of certain places, events and behaviors. Sound itself does not work. However, in the case of large infrastructures of mobility such as motorways, highways or cargo ports, which are spectacular and sonic at the same time, there are no grounds for secluding vision from hearing. Moreover, these places also smell and are physically experienced, so experiencing them will always be a kind of sensual semiosis. Joachim-Ernst Berendt proposed the idea of democracy of senses, where no sense shall have priority over the other ones (Berendt 1985, 32). It is not about replacing the visual perspective but about emphasizing the signifi-



cance of the sonic or olfactory one. The visually established epistemology is insufficient and often misleading in its description and interpretation of social worlds. Based on anthropology, especially with reference to its key method of participant observation, democratization of senses undermines the authoritarianism of an anthropologist, who has been, has seen, has taken notes and has interpreted. Sonic representations of cultures facilitate a more direct access to reality which earlier could only be described by an anthropologist. In this way, deep listening (Schafer 1977) can be treated as analogous to Geertz's thick description (Geertz 1973, 3-30). The listening is neither easy nor obvious since it requires attuning one's ears to listening to numerous layers of meanings ascribed to sounds and is related to the practice of dialogue. In the industrial and infrastructural contexts, this is like breaking through stereotypical listening: the not completely obvious hums and relativity of noise. Sound forces us to rethink the meanings of the social experiencing of the world and affords us an opportunity to have an insight into the relationality of experiences, into how we enter into relationships with other people and the spaces we inhabit.

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